

THE LIBERTY "76" BOYS OF 76

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THE LIBERTY BOYS' BEACONLIGHT!

OR, THE SIGNAL ON THE MOUNTAIN.

By HARRY MOORE.



The girl carried sticks and piled them on the fire, which was serving the purpose of a beacon light, luring the redcoats into a trap. Already two were prisoners, and the "Liberty Boys" were overpowering two more.

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CHAPTER I.

TROUBLE AT A DANCE.

"Hello! they seem to be having a jolly good time here, I must say!"

It was the last week in September of the year 1780. A man, who had been riding along a road in North Carolina, in the western part, not far from the Catawba River, had brought his horse to a stop in front of a house of goodly size, standing perhaps fifty yards back from the road.

It was night, being perhaps half-past nine o'clock, and the house was lighted up, while the sound of music and dancing came to the traveler's hearing.

The lone rider sat there for more than a minute, seemingly debating something in his mind. Indeed this was what he was doing; he was trying to decide whether he should stop and ask to be allowed to remain over night, or whether he should go on and trust to luck to reach another house soon, where there were no festivities being held.

As the lone traveler was a young man not more than twenty years of age, he finally came to the decision which might have been looked for: He decided to stop here. There were a number of horses tied to the fence near at hand and the young man dismounted and tied his horse. Then he entered the yard and walked to the house and knocked on the front door.

The door did not open, and judging that the dancers were making so much noise his knock had not been heard, the young man knocked again.

This time the door opened and a colored servant stood there.

"May I come in?" the young man asked.

The negress hesitated an instant and then opened the door wide and said: "I guesses ez how yo' mought ez well come in, sah; ever'buddy dat wants ter cum in hez done et so fur."

The stranger entered and found himself in a large hall. To the left, through an open doorway, he saw the dancers,

and was somewhat surprised to note that the men were British soldiers. There were six of them on the floor, dancing, and each had for a partner a young lady of the region. The young man, who was a close observer, did not think those girls looked very happy or well pleased, and another glance around the room made the affair plain to him—so he thought, at least.

Along the walls of the room was ranged eight or ten girls, and perhaps a dozen young men, who, as the traveler could tell by their dress, were young men of the vicinity. These young men did not look happy; their faces were lowering and sullen.

"I think I understand the situation," the strange young man said to himself; "the redcoats have happened along, heard the music and dancing, just as I did, and stopped and came in and took the affair into their own hands. It is easy to see that the young fellows don't like it. Well, for half a shilling, I would take a hand in this myself; I don't think those redcoats should be allowed to have everything their own way."

He turned to the servant girl. "If you please," he said, "you need not announce me. I will enter the room quietly and make myself at home in my own way."

"Berry well, sah," was the reply, and then, seemingly glad to escape the responsibility of having admitted the stranger, the negress hastened away.

The young man took off his hat and left it in the hall and then entered the room quietly. The redcoats, who were engrossed in their occupation of dancing, did not notice the young man, but the young men and girls who were not dancing saw him and stared at him in surprise, and, so far as the girls were concerned, with considerable of admiration as well, for he was a remarkably handsome young fellow.

The traveler was not extra well dressed, his clothing being of ordinary cloth and showing the signs of considerable use, but the owner was such a bright, handsome-looking fellow that his clothing did not attract much notice.

"Isn't he handsome!"

"I wonder who he is?"

"Did you ever see him before?"

"He must be a stranger in these parts."

"I hope he'll stay and give us a chance to dance with him!"

Such were a few of the exclamations and remarks whispered to one another by the girls.

The young men were quite curious regarding the newcomer also and they wondered who he was and where he came from.

"I wonder who he is?"

"He's a stranger."

"Yes, and thank goodness he isn't a redcoat!"

"He's a handsome fellow, isn't he?"

"Yes, and a resolute-looking one."

"You are right; he looks as if he would not be afraid of the Old Nick himself."

Such were some of the remarks made by the young men. Presently one, who was a brisk, good-natured young fellow, walked across the room and took his place beside the stranger.

"Good evening!" he greeted, pleasantly.

"Good evening!" was the reply. "You seem to be having a very pleasant time."

The young man made a wry face. "The redcoats seem to be having a very pleasant time," he said, significantly, and with considerable of displeasure and disgust in his tones; "the rest of us do not seem to be getting much fun out of it."

"How is that?" with an assumption of surprise. "Did you not invite the redcoats to the dance?"

"Well, I rather guess not!"

"You didn't?"

"No."

"How came they to be in here, then, and dancing?"

"They walked in."

"Of their own accord?"

"Yes."

"Well, it seems to me that that was rather impudent in them."

"That's the way I look at it; and so do the rest of the boys."

"I should think you would."

"Yes; but we can't help ourselves."

"Why not?"

"Why, don't you see? The redcoats are armed with pistols and swords, and we are unarmed."

"I see; but you outnumber them more than two to one."

"I know; but their weapons still leave them the stronger force, if it came to a combat."

The young traveler shook his head. "I don't know about that," he said; "if you were to make a sudden and concerted attack on them I think you could overpower them before they could use their weapons."

"It might be as you say," said the young man, dubiously; "if we had some one to take the lead and had had experience in such matters. But as it is I don't think we would dare attack them. We would simply be butchered."

"I suppose the majority of you young people who are here are patriots, then?"

"Yes; I don't think there is a Tory in the house."

"I guessed that from the way you talked."

"You guessed right."

"I take it that you don't like to have the redcoats monopolize your girls the way they are doing?"

The other made a grimace. "I should say not!" he exclaimed. "Do you see the girl with that captain, there? That is my girl. We have been sweethearts for three years, and will marry in a year; well, you don't suppose I enjoy seeing that blamed redcoat have his arms around her and go dancing around the room with her, do you?"

The young stranger could hardly keep from laughing. He realized, however, that it was a serious matter with the young man, and did not let the other see that he was amused.

"I judge that it isn't a pleasant sight," he said, quietly.

"Pleasant? I should say not! I'd like to put a bullet through him!"

"So the redcoats simply walked right in and took charge of affairs and went in to enjoy themselves, did they?" There was a peculiar, speculative tone to the young man's voice.

"Yes, that is just what they did; and I judge, from the way it looks, that we fellows who got together here with our sweethearts, to have some enjoyment, will have to sit at one side and watch those scoundrels enjoy themselves."

"That isn't a pleasant outlook."

"I should say not."

"And you would change the present state of affairs if you could do so?"

"We certainly would."

"Well, I don't see why the change should not be made." The strange young man spoke calmly, but as if he meant what he said.

"You don't?" There was surprise and considerable doubt in the young Southerner's tone.

"No."

"How could it be done?"

"Well, you said a little while ago that if you fellows had a leader—some one who had had experience in such matters—to take the lead and show you what to do you might do something."

"So I did."

"Well, I am willing to act as your leader."

The stranger spoke calmly, and the other eyed him, searchingly. Somehow he was impressed by the young man's looks. There was something about him that suggested that he had had considerable experience in warfare. "I more than half believe he is a soldier—and a patriot soldier at that!" the young Southerner said to himself. Aloud he said:

"You are willing to act as our leader?"

"Yes, if you are willing to see to it that the young men act promptly when the time comes. If you will guarantee that they go for the redcoats for all they are worth."

"I think I can promise you that they will do that," was the reply. "They would like a chance to give those redcoats a good thumping, but they are afraid of the words and pistols."

"They need not be."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. You see, if the young men all attack the redcoats in a body and at the same instant, two leaping upon each of them, the redcoats will not have a chance to draw swords or pistols."

"I see; that does seem reasonable."

"Certainly. That is all that is necessary; that there be concerted action. You would have to act instantly when I give the signal."

"Well, I am sure that I can answer for the boys that they will be not only willing but glad and eager to make the attack."

"All right, then; as you are all patriots, and so are friends, I will tell you who I am; but you must not speak my name aloud as I don't want the redcoats to know who I am or that such a person is in this part of the country. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes!" the youth's voice was eager, for he began to understand, now, that the young stranger was some one of note and importance. "We won't speak your name aloud, but if you are some one well known, if you will tell me your name so I can tell the boys, it will give them more confidence and will be likely to have considerable effect in making our attack on the redcoats successful."

"Very well; I will tell you: My name is Slater—Dick Slater."

A look of surprise and delight appeared on the face of the young Southerner.

"I have heard of you many times!" he said. "And you are Dick Slater, the famous patriot, scout, spy and captain of 'The Liberty Boys of '76'?"

"Yes, I am the captain of the 'Liberty Boys.'"

"Good! Splendid! The boys will go into this affair gladly and confidently, now; and they will give the redcoats some rough handling if the scoundrels try to use their weapons."

"That is the point; we must not let the redcoats use their weapons."

"I understand."

"We must overpower and disarm them."

"Exactly; pull their teeth, eh?"

"Yes."

"And then what shall we do with them?"

"Well, we can decide that later."

"So we can."

"Well, you go and have a talk with your friends; pass the word along and tell them to be ready for the signal, and the instant it is given for them to leap to the attack."

"All right; but what will be the signal?"

"The words: 'Down with the king!'"

"All right; I'll go and pass the word around among the boys."

"Do so."

The youth hastened to rejoin his companions on the other side of the room and he immediately began whispering to them and then they whispered to one another, and it was evident that they were greatly pleased and excited. The girls were eager to be let into the secret, and the boys whispered to the girls, and many were the admiring glances sent across to where Dick stood, leaning quietly and carelessly against the wall.

"And so that is Dick Slater!"

"I've heard so much about him!"

"Isn't he handsome!"

"They say he is one of the most daring fellows in the world!"

"Goodness! I hope the boys will succeed in getting the better of the redcoats!"

"I'm afraid, aren't you?"

Such were a few of the exclamations and remarks made to one another by the girls, while the young men were coming to an understanding of what they were to do.

Dick was watching them and also keeping an eye on the redcoats, and presently the young man who had talked with him caught his eye and gave a nod, which said that

all was settled and that the youths would be ready to act the instant the signal was given. Dick nodded in reply, and then turned his entire attention to the redcoats.

A few minutes later the British soldiers stopped dancing, and the captain called out, with a grin and a wink at his comrades: "First salute, and then seat your partners."

At the words from the captain the redcoats, himself included, attempted to kiss the six girls they had been dancing with. Now, the maidens, while unwilling, had feared to refuse to dance with the redcoats—had consented to do so in order to avoid trouble between them and their sweethearts, in truth, but to permit themselves to be kissed was another matter. They felt that this was carrying the thing altogether too far; and so, instead of letting the men kiss them, the girls tore themselves loose from the grasp of the men and ran across the room to where the other girls were—with one exception. When the girl who had danced with the British captain attempted to jerk away from him he had seized her in his arms, and, holding her tightly, was doing his best to try to kiss the struggling girl, when Dick Slater leaped forward and cried, sternly:

"Unhand the young lady, you big coward!"

CHAPTER II.

THE DISCOMFITURE OF THE REDCOATS.

The girl's lover had started to leap forward to her assistance, but Dick had waved him back at the moment he leaped forward, and the youth, so great was his respect for and faith in Dick Slater, obeyed and paused, saying to himself: "He'll settle with that redcoat scoundrel!" The youth's hands were clenched, however, and there was a fierce look in his eyes and on his face as he glared at the British captain.

Dick's action took the redcoats by surprise, and they stared at him in amazement. They had not noticed that a stranger was present, and his sudden appearance and exclamation gave them a great surprise. The captain was so astonished on account of being spoken to in such a fashion, and addressed as a scoundrel, that he involuntarily released his hold on the girl and she leaped away and took refuge among the others at the side of the room.

"Did you—did I understand you to apply an epithet to me?" the captain cried, staring at Dick in mingled amazement and rage.

"I don't know what you understood," was Dick's calm reply.

"Never mind that. You applied the epithet of coward to me, did you not?" The officer's look and tone were threatening in the extreme, but it did not seem to have any effect on Dick, who replied, promptly and calmly:

"I did."

"Why did you do it?"

"Because it is true."

"Oh, you think it is true, do you?"

"I am positive of it."

"What makes you so positive?"

"It is a simple matter to answer that question."

"Do so, then."

The captain was eyeing Dick, closely, and it was evident that he was delaying attacking the youth in order to have time to study him.

"Well, no one but a coward would attempt to kiss a young lady against her will."

"Oh, that's the way you arrive at the belief that I am a coward, is it?"

"Yes."

"But how do you know I was trying to kiss the young lady against her will?"

"That was self-evident."

"How do you make that out?"

"She was trying to escape from you."

"Oh, ho! Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the captain. "It is plain that you don't know much about young ladies. They always make a great show of being angry, and of trying to get away, but it is all put on. They are not trying very hard, and they are wanting the kiss quite as much as the man is wanting to give it to them."

Dick's lip curled with scorn. "I don't think you know as much about young ladies as you think you do," he said. "It is no doubt true that they do like to be kissed—but they are very particular who they permit to kiss them. They do not like to be kissed promiscuously, I am sure."

"Oh, well, that is a matter of opinion."

"Perhaps so."

"Yes; so we will lay it over and come down to business."

"I am quite willing."

"You called me a coward."

"I did."

"You still adhere to that belief, then?"

"I do."

"And you are not willing to retract the assertion?"

"No."

"Nor to beg my pardon?"

"Assuredly not."

The officer, and his five comrades as well," looked at the young man who was so boldly facing them and practically bidding them defiance, searchingly, and with considerable curiosity. They seemed to realize that he was not one of the young beaux who had been enjoying themselves when they first put in an appearance. They were sure he was a stranger, and there was something about him which impressed them with the belief that he was a young man who had had a great deal of experience.

"Who are you?" the captain asked, abruptly.

"Why do you wish to know?" asked Dick.

"I have a curiosity regarding the matter, that is all."

"Oh, that's it?"

"Yes."

"I don't see what it matters who I am."

"Well, I do."

"You do?"

"Yes; I wish to know who you are, before killing you, so as to be enabled to enter your name on my list of victims."

The officer said this in a somewhat fierce voice and with a fierce look on his face, but if he expected to impress the young stranger, he was disappointed; for the youth burst into a laugh. Dick could not help it; the idea was so absurd. And he kept on laughing to such an extent that the British captain grew angry and disgusted.

"Shut up!" he growled. "What do you find funny about my statement?"

"Why the statement itself—the entire thing."

"What is there funny about it?"

"The idea of your keeping a list of your victims. How long and large a list have you, if I may ask?"

"I have a list with twenty-six names on it." The captain said this boastfully and with an air that said he was proud of it.

"Do you really mean it?" asked Dick, and now the smile was gone from his face and there was a peculiar, grim, dangerous look in his eyes and on his face.

"Of course I mean it!"

"And you have killed twenty-six people, you say?"

"Yes, and all Americans!"

"I suppose the majority of them were women and children," said Dick, in a cold, stern voice; "and that the men were all shot in the back."

The captain flushed angrily.

"No, they were not mostly women and children, nor were the men shot in the back!" he growled. "What makes you say that?"

"I cannot conceive of a coward such as you are killing people under any other circumstances than those I have mentioned," was the reply.

"See here, you are altogether too insolent!" cried the captain, growing red in the face.

"Don't take any more of his insolence, captain!"

"No, put a stop to his talk."

"Kill the young scoundrel!"

"I believe he's a rebel!"

Such were the exclamations of the redcoats, who were wondering why their commander had not long ago cut or shot the young stranger down.

Dick saw that a climax was at hand, and gave the youths at the side of the room a quick, significant glance. He noted, with satisfaction, that they were ready for action. They were half crouched and there was an eager, excited look on their faces—a determined look it was, too.

The captain glared at Dick for a few moments, in silence, and then said, in a low but fierce and threatening voice: "I did not intend to injure you severely, but you have been so impudent and have talked so insultingly that now nothing but your life's blood will satisfy me. I am going to kill you!"

As he finished speaking the captain started to draw his sword, but as he made the first motion toward doing so Dick struck out straight from the shoulder. His fist hit the captain fair between the eyes and knocked him down as promptly and effectively as if he had been struck by a sledge-hammer. Then Dick cried out:

"Down with the king!"

The youths had awaited the signal, eagerly, and the instant Dick gave utterance to the words they leaped forward with all the energy and eagerness of hounds suddenly let loose on a scent. They obeyed Dick's instructions to the letter and divided up in twos and attacked the five redcoats all at the same moment. The result was that though the redcoats tried to draw weapons they were unable to do so and were quickly thrown down upon the floor with sufficient force to temporarily daze them, and their weapons were taken from them. The captain was leaped upon by two of the youths, before he could struggle to his feet, and his weapons were removed also.

Then at a command from Dick the youths permitted the six redcoats to rise.

The girls had been frightened when the encounter started, and had uttered a few startled cries, but the affair was so quickly over and their friends had conquered so completely that their cries quickly changed to exclamations of delight and satisfaction.

"Oh, I'm so glad our boys whipped them!"

"Oh, goody! goody!"

"They've taken the redcoats' weapons away from them!"

"Yes, they are helpless now!"

"I guess they won't force us girls to dance with them again to-night!" This from one of the girls who had been forced to dance with one of the British soldiers.

As for the redcoats, they looked crestfallen in the extreme. They looked down their noses, all but the captain, and he glared at Dick with the look of a fiend. If looks would have killed, Dick would have dropped in his tracks.

Dick met the officer's gaze with a cool look of satisfaction, and with a faint smile curling his lips.

"Well, what do you think of matters as they stand now?" the youth asked.

"I think this is an outrage!" was the angry reply, in a voice hoarse with rage.

"Oh, that is what you think, is it?"

"Yes."

"Awhile ago you seemed to think it all right to force the young ladies to dance with you against their will, and even to kiss them; now, with the shoe on the other foot, so to speak, when you are the ones who have to do as you are told to do, you do not seem to enjoy it nearly so well."

"Give us back our weapons," said the captain.

Dick shook his head.

"I could not think of doing that," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because I am afraid you would immediately attempt to use them and that would be bad."

"Give us back our weapons and we will at once take our leave and will not bother you any more."

Dick smiled.

"You won't bother us any more, anyway," he said.

The captain frowned, and it was evident that it was only with great difficulty that he managed to keep back an exclamation that might have damaged himself and comrades.

"Surely you do not intend to keep our weapons?" he said.

"Why not?"

"Why, you have no right to do anything of the kind."

"But you forget that these are war times," said Dick.

"What difference does that make?"

"A good deal."

"I don't see why it should."

"You see, and understand very well; but you are not willing to acknowledge it, that is all."

"No, I don't see why the fact that these are war times should make you have the right to keep our weapons."

"It is simple enough, as you know; in war times, might often makes right, and this is one of the times when that is the case."

A muttered curse escaped the captain's lips.

"You will be sorry for carrying things in this high-handed fashion!" he growled.

"I don't think so," smiled Dick; "I am quite willing to risk it, anyhow."

"Then you are going to keep our weapons?"

"Yes."

"You will regret it."

"Oh, I guess not."

"Yes, you will! You will be sorry you ever treated soldiers of the king in such fashion!"

"I don't think so; and as for you, you ought to be thankful that we do not hold you prisoners."

"What would you do with us?"

"Oh, we could send you to the patriot army and turn you over to the American commander."

"Bah! there is no patriot army in this part of the country."

"Perhaps not."

"I know there is not."

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter; you are at liberty to take your departure, but you will have to leave your weapons behind."

"I have a proposition to make to you," said the captain, abruptly.

"What is it?"

"That you fight a duel with me!"

CHAPTER III.

DICK TEACHES CAPTAIN SHARPLEY A LESSON.

Dick—and, in fact, everybody in the room—stared at the officer in amazement.

"Fight a duel with you?" said Dick.

"Yes."

"Why should I do that?"

"I'll tell you: I will fight you with sword or pistols, and if you defeat me you may keep our weapons; but if I defeat you we are to be allowed to have our weapons again."

Dick laughed.

"There would be no sense in my doing that," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because we already have the weapons and can keep them as well without my fighting you as if I were to do so."

"I know; but you would feel better about it, would you not, if you had really won the weapons by defeating me?"

"We have already won them by defeating you," was Dick's reply.

"I know, but that doesn't count."

"I think it does."

The captain frowned.

"Oh, come," he said, persuasively, "be fair and give us chance."

"You had your chance and lost."

"We didn't have any chance. You took us by surprise and were double our number."

"We had to counteract your weapons in some way, and we could only do it by force of numbers."

"Say that you will fight me," said the officer, insistently.

"I don't wish to fight you."

"Why not?"

"For the reason that I do not wish to kill you."

This was spoken in such a calm, matter-of-fact manner that the captain and his men stared.

"Oh, you don't wish to kill me, eh?" sneered the officer, presently.

"That is it, exactly."

"Humph! How very kind of you!"

"I know you mean to be sarcastic," said Dick; "but it does not matter. It does not alter the facts in the case that the only reason I have for not wishing to fight you is because I do not wish to kill you."

"Well, you need not be afraid," was the reply, with rather a boastful air; "you—or, indeed, two like you, could not kill me."

"You seem to have considerable confidence in your prowess."

"I have great confidence in it."

"Perhaps too much."

"No; my confidence is born of experience."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; I have killed five in duels."

"Then if that is true I do not think you are intending to give me a fair chance when you try to inveigle me into fighting you."

The captain bit his lips in vexation. He had been led into "giving himself away," as it were, when he had not intended to do so.

"Oh, well," he said, "perhaps you are such a wonderful

warrior that you will not hesitate to meet me on that account."

"You are right," was the prompt reply; "I would not hesitate an instant on that account. But I do not see that I am called upon to meet you. We have possession of your weapons and can keep them, and that settles it. You are at liberty to go, so had better make use of your opportunity and go before we change our minds about permitting you to do so."

The captain's face grew dark.

"But you struck me!" he hissed. "You knocked me down, and I am not the man to forgive or forget a thing of that kind. You have got to settle with me sooner or later, and you might as well do it now as later. There is a good moon out, so come out of doors, if you are not an arrant coward, and I will teach you a few things in sword practice that you do not at present know."

"And if I decline?"

"Then I shall brand you as a coward—a blow and a coward, just as you accused me a while ago!"

"But that would not be true."

"It wouldn't?"

"No."

"And you are not a coward?"

"I am not."

"Then prove it by meeting me."

Dick frowned.

"I tell you, sir, that while I do not like you or any one who wears a coat the color of the one you have on, I have not enough against you to make me desirous of taking your life," said Dick, sternly; "and for fear that I might have to do so, if we should cross swords, I prefer to avoid the danger and refuse to meet you."

"Then it is not because you may have to kill me that you refuse," cried the officer, "but it is because you are afraid you may be killed yourself!"

"You are mistaken."

"I know I am not. You are a coward!"

"That will do," said Dick, coldly; "you are foolish to try to anger me into agreeing to meet you."

"You said a while ago that I was a coward," said the captain, hotly; "now I tell you to your teeth that you lie!"

A cold, dangerous smile came over Dick's face.

"I see you are bound to have it," he said, in a calm, even voice.

"I am bound to have satisfaction for your striking me!" the captain hissed.

"You would probably get a good deal more satisfaction than you are looking for."

"That is bravado, spoken with the purpose of trying to discourage me, but it won't work," said Captain Sharp-ley.

"Then you will not be satisfied unless we fight?"

"I will not."

"Very well, then; come out of doors. We will soon settle the matter. I am not averse to taking some of the conceit out of you, for I see you think you are a wonderful swordsman."

The officer seemed surprised. He stared at the young man in amazement.

"I am one of the best swordsmen in the British army," he said.

"I am glad to hear it. I will teach you a few things which you do not know, and it will not be said that I took advantage of a tyro."

"No, you need not be afraid that it will be said that you took advantage of a tyro—eh, boys?" with a grin.

His five men shook their heads.

"No, he need not be afraid of that."

"He'll find that you are not a novice."

"Indeed he will, captain!"

"It will be you who will teach him some tricks!"

"I hope you will run him through."

Such were the remarks of the redcoats.

Dick smiled, and taking two swords out of the scabbards, nodded toward the officer and said: "Come, we will settle this matter at once."

Dick led the way, the redcoats following, and behind them came the young men, while still back of them came the girls, many of whom could not resist the temptation to witness the combat.

"We will go out into the road," said Dick; and this was done.

As soon as they were there, Dick handed the captain one of the swords.

"Now, sir," he said, "I wish this thing understood before we begin."

"So do I," was the reply.

"It is understood that if you conquer me your men are to be given their weapons and allowed to go their way. Is that satisfactory?"

"Yes."

"Very good; now for our side of it. If I conquer you I wish it understood, first, that you are to go your way, weaponless."

"That is all right," said the captain, with a smile.

"Further," continued Dick, "you are to give your word of honor that you will not return to this place or at-

tempt to bother these people in any way, shape or form. Is that satisfactory?"

"Yes, I agree to that also."

"Very well; then there is no need of delaying long. Are you ready?"

"Ready!"

"Very well; engage!"

The next instant the blades struck together with a resounding clash, causing sparks to fly from the fine tempered steel, and screams of fear to come from the lips of the girls.

"Oh, I'm afraid he'll be killed!" said one girl in the ear of another. She was referring to Dick, of course.

"I hope not!" was the reply.

"And so do I!"

It is unnecessary to say that the combat was watched eagerly by all. The young men were anxious regarding the safety of Dick Slater, and the five redcoats were moved more by curiosity to see how good a swordsman the comrade had encountered than aught else; they did not for a moment think that he had met his equal.

They were destined to be surprised, however, as was the captain himself. When the officer tried to press matters, with the intention of putting an end to the affair quickly, he found that his opponent had an impregnable defense. The Briton had never seen anything like it. His best thrusts were parried with ease; his pet feints were laughed at. The young man was proving himself to be a wonderful swordsman, and the redcoats did know what to think.

The moon was shining brightly, and it was almost as good for an encounter of this kind as if it had been daylight. The contestants could see to do their best work, and the spectators could see every movement.

Clash! clash! clash! went the swords, and the British officer exerted himself to get in a thrust that would disable his expert antagonist. He realized already that he was going to have to do his best if he were to win. His comrades realized it also and a sober look was on their faces. What if the captain should be defeated, after all? they asked themselves.

As the officer found himself met and foiled at every point, his anger grew and he began a fierce attack, thinking to beat his opponent's guard down by sheer strength, but here again he met with failure, for Dick was stronger than the captain, and speedily proved to him that he could not make a success of such tactics.

The young men and the girls, as they saw that Dick was at least holding his own, began to gain confidence, and the

hope that their champion might win grew almost to the belief that he would do so. Somehow his coolness inspired them with faith in him.

"You are a good hand with the sword," said the captain, viciously; "but I'll get you yet!"

"You think so?" Dick's tone and air were cool and calm.

"Yes; you cannot long withstand me."

"You think not?"

"I am sure of it."

"I don't think—if you will pardon me for contradicting you—that you think any such thing."

"But I do, though!"

"No; you are merely talking to keep your own courage up, and in the hope, incidentally, that you may have some effect on me."

"Bah!"

"Saying 'bah' won't help your case, captain."

There was a laugh from the young men, and indeed from a few of the girls—the stronger-nerved ones—at this, and the sound of their laughter enraged the captain terribly. He muttered a curse, but he was already doing all he knew with the sword, so could not increase the fierceness of his attack.

"I will run you through in less than a minute!" he cried.

"You had better give yourself more time than that," said Dick, quietly; "I am sure you cannot make your words good. Now if you had said a month you would have a better chance—though I don't believe you could do it in that time."

Again the young men and some of the girls laughed, and again the officer muttered a curse. He realized that when he came to coolness and confidence, the young stranger was his superior, and he was beginning to be possessed of the fear that the young fellow was his superior with the sword also. His comrades began to fear the same thing, and one whispered to another:

"I'm afraid the captain has struck a snag, this time!"

"I guess you are right," was the reply.

The officer's efforts were beginning to tell on him. He was becoming tired. Dick noticed that the attack was growing less fierce, and realized at once that his opponent had practically exhausted himself. He decided to begin mashing matters, now, on his account, and put an end to the affair.

"Well, captain," he said, quietly, "as you are tired, I will now relieve you of the offense and let you do the

defending. It is only fair, you know, as one man should not be forced to do all the work."

A muttered curse escaped the captain's lips, and the redcoats nudged one another and exchanged significant looks.

"I guess it's all up with the captain," murmured one to his next neighbor.

"It looks that way," was the reply.

"I am not tired," said the captain, in reply to Dick's words; "I am as fresh as ever."

"I hate to dispute your word, sir," said Dick, with elaborate politeness, "but your attack lacks strength and vim, and so I know from that that you are tired. Permit me!" and then he suddenly began such a fierce attack that the officer was forced back in spite of all he could do.

"Just to show you that you are not such a great swordsman as you think, I shall touch you two or three times, captain," said Dick; "there," as the point of the sword pricked the captain's chest, "I could have run you through then had I so desired."

"I don't believe it!" cried the officer, almost wild with rage and discomfiture. "That was only an accident."

"Here goes for another accident," said Dick, coolly; "I will 'accidentally' touch you on the cheek this time and draw blood."

The youth did so, and another cry of rage and pain escaped the captain's lips.

"You see, it is very simple and easy," said Dick; "you are entirely at my mercy, so you might as well surrender."

"Never! I will not do it! I am not at your mercy. You are just boasting. You touched me by accident!"

"I assure you that you are mistaken," said Dick; "and to prove it to you I will touch you again."

He did so, and then went on: "You see, there is nothing of accident about it. I can touch you when and where I please; and could, if I so desired, run you through instead of simply drawing blood. You would do well to surrender, captain."

But the captain was stubborn. "I will never surrender!" he said. "I do not believe you are a better swordsman than I. I will not acknowledge myself beaten until I am beaten."

"You are beaten now."

"I am not."

"You are; every person who is looking on knows it."

"It isn't true!" the captain's voice trembled, so great was his anger and discomfiture.

"Your own men will tell you so; and if they have any

regard for your safety they will do well to speak up and tell you to give up and acknowledge yourself beaten."

"If one of them utters a word I'll shoot him, as sure as my name is Sharpley!" the officer cried. And so great was the power of discipline that the men did not dare utter a word.

"Very well, then; since you won't let them speak and tell you you are at my mercy, and since you refuse to acknowledge it and surrender, I shall have to take the matter into my own hands."

"You cannot harm me," said the captain; but there was something in the tone that told that the speaker did not believe what he said.

"I will show you something," said Dick, and then he began a furious attack on his opponent. His former efforts were very mild alongside these, and the result was soon apparent. The captain, in his almost exhausted condition, could not withstand the youth, and almost before any one knew what was happening there was a sharp clang, and the officer's sword was knocked out of his hand and fell to the ground, ten feet away. Dick had disarmed his opponent.

"Now, captain, I guess you will acknowledge defeat," said Dick, quietly; "I could have killed you, but did not wish to do so. You and your men are at liberty to go."

The officer said not a word, but made a gesture and walked to where the horses were tied, his men following. A few moments later they were in the saddle and riding away at a gallop.

"Well, it's all over," said Dick, calmly; "now you may go back into the house and enjoy yourselves without being bothered by the redcoats."

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAPTAIN REPORTS.

If ever there was an angry and disgusted man it was Captain Sharpley. He rode along in silence for a few minutes, and then burst out with a torrent of curses, after which he said:

"Did you ever hear of such luck in all your life, boys? Who would have thought that I would be defeated in a sword combat by that young scoundrel?"

"Nobody would have thought it, captain," one replied; "it is the most astonishing thing I ever heard of."

"I can hardly believe it even now!" from another.

"Well, it's real enough!" growled the captain. "He defeated me, all right enough. But I don't understand it."

"Nor I," from the man who was riding beside the captain.

"I would never have expected to find my equal with the sword in this blasted country," the captain growled.

"You are right; and that makes me think that that young fellow is more than he seems."

"Ah! you don't think he is an ordinary traveler, do you?"

"I do not. No ordinary man would be able to use a sword like he did."

"By Jove! I believe you are right."

"I am sure that I am."

"What do you think about the fellow, Mortimer?"

"I think he is a soldier."

"A rebel soldier, eh?"

"Yes; and an officer."

"The probabilities are that you are right," agreed the captain; "if he is a soldier he is an officer, as a common soldier would not understand the use of the sword as that fellow understands it."

"No; our own dragoons know but little of real sword play, you know."

"You are right; all they know how to do is to cut downward from the back of a horse."

"That is it, exactly."

"But who can the fellow be? If he is a rebel soldier and an officer, who is he?"

"That is the question."

"And a difficult one to answer."

"You are right."

"And where is he from?"

"That is another difficult question."

"So it is; but I am going to find out those things about Mortimer."

"How are you going to do it?"

"I'll tell you: We will go straight back to camp."

"Yes."

"I will go to Major Ferguson and report."

"Yes."

"He will be angry."

"You may be sure he will be. He will get his Irish in a jiffy."

"Yes; he will be eager to know something more about this stranger."

"He certainly will, for he has almost as much curiosity in most things as a woman."

"So he has; well, I will work on his curiosity and him to let me take a score of men and return to the house where the dance is being held."

"That is a good scheme."

"I think so."

"And your plan is to——"

"Make a prisoner of that young scoundrel!"

"I see. And then you will——"

"Take him back to camp with us."

"Exactly."

"And there we will put him through a course of sprouts."

"That's the way to talk!"

"We will make him tell us who he is."

"Yes."

"And where he came from and what he is doing down here in this part of the country."

"He may prove to be stubborn."

"We can take it out of him."

"Well, I'm in for doing as you say, for I confess I have a great curiosity regarding the fellow."

"And so have I. I know he is no common man, young as he is."

"That is a self-evident fact."

"You are right; no common man could have defeated me in a duel with swords."

"Never!"

The redcoats rode onward at a gallop for perhaps half an hour, and had gone a distance of three miles or more, when they were hailed:

"Halt! Who comes there?"

"Friends!" called out the captain.

"Advance, friends, and give the countersign."

The six redcoats rode forward till close to the sentinel, and then the officer said: "Death to rebels!"

"All right; pass on," said the sentinel. "Oh, it's you, is it, Sharpley?" he added.

"Yes, it's me," was the captain's reply, and he and his comrades rode on to where the horses were tied, and dismounted. They tied their horses and then entered the camp proper. The five men threw themselves down near a camp-fire and called for some food, while the captain strode onward to the tent occupied by the commander of this force.

The force in question consisted of two hundred dragoons and one thousand Tories, who had been drilled into a light infantry corps. The force was under the command of Major Patrick Ferguson, who was a good officer and a good fighter, but a little bit enthusiastic and hot-headed, as might have been expected, he being an Irishman.

"It's me, Captain Sharpley," said the officer to the orderly, who met him at the entrance to the tent occupied

by the major; "tell Major Ferguson I wish to see him at once."

"Come in, captain!" called out a voice from within the tent. It was the voice of the major, who had heard the captain's words.

The captain entered and found the major reading by the light of a candle. He laid the book down and looked at the newcomer, inquiringly.

"What is it, captain?" he asked, in a rich brogue.

"I have come to report to you, major."

"Ah, yes."

"Myself and five companions were out on a scouting expedition, you know."

"Yes, yes; I know."

"We have just got back."

"Did you learn anything?"

"Yes, I did," replied the captain, drily, and he emphasized the "I" in such a manner as to attract the major's attention.

"You learned something, eh?" he remarked, emphasizing the "you."

"I did."

"What did you learn?"

"That there are better swordsmen in this country than myself."

The major stared.

"Better swordsmen in this country than you?" he exclaimed.

The captain nodded.

"Yes," he said.

"You mean that you encountered a man—an American, a rebel, who was your superior with the sword?"

"That is just what I mean."

The major was very much excited.

"Tell me about it," he said; "tell me all about it at once!"

The captain did so, being interrupted occasionally by exclamations from the major, who could hardly contain himself sufficiently to sit still and listen.

"Well, if that doesn't beat anything I ever heard of!" he cried, when the story was finished. "To think that you, six British soldiers, should allow yourselves to be set upon by a gang of boys and relieved of your weapons and sent away without them! It is outrageous!"

"We don't feel very good over the affair, ourselves, Major Ferguson," said the captain, drily.

"Well, I should think that you would not! And then to think that you were beaten in a sword combat by that young stranger!"

"He is a rebel of note, young as he is," said the captain, with conviction; "I would be willing to wager that if we knew his name we would recognize it as being one that is well known, perhaps famous as that of a rebel officer."

"Perhaps so; he is undoubtedly not an ordinary man, judging by what you have told me of him."

"You are right; he is not an ordinary man, but an extraordinary one."

"Jove! I wish I knew who he is!"

"Why not find out, major?"

"How will it be accomplished?"

"By capturing him."

The major knitted his brows.

"Do you think it can be accomplished?" he asked.

"I think so."

"Do you think you could do it?"

"Give me twenty men and I will make the attempt."

"You may have the men and are at liberty to make the attempt, but I don't think you will succeed."

"You don't?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"For the reason that I think that young fellow is far too shrewd to permit himself to be captured."

"You think he will be on his guard?"

"I do. I do not believe that you will find him when you go back to the house where the dance is being held."

"You don't?"

"No."

"You think he will have disappeared, eh?"

"Well, I don't believe that you will find him."

"Anyway, we will make the trial."

"Oh, yes, you can do that. It will do no harm."

"No; well, I will select my men and be off at once."

"Yes, the quicker you go the better will be your chances of making a success—but I think they are very slim at the best."

"You seem to have gotten a very good opinion of the young stranger."

"I have; I can readily see that he is a shrewd young man."

"All the more reason we should make every attempt to capture him."

"That is true; and I hope you will succeed."

"We will do our best to succeed."

"Do so, and come and report as soon as you get back."

"I will do so, major."

Then the captain saluted and took his departure.

He went at once to the place where his company was

encamped, and the five who had been with him asked him eagerly what success he had had with the major.

"Are we to go back and try to capture that fellow?" asked one, and the captain nodded assent.

"Yes, we are to go," he said; "I am going to take twenty of you boys with me. I will name the ones I wish to go, and he proceeded to do so.

"Now," he said, when he had finished, "you boys get ready as quickly as possible, and we will be off."

Fifteen minutes later the little party of twenty-one men rode out of the encampment and up the road in the direction of the house where the dance was being held.

CHAPTER V.

DICK'S DOZEN.

If the redcoats thought to take the young stranger by surprise, they were doomed to be disappointed, however. The instant the six had disappeared from sight, after the duel, Dick had untied his horse and leaped into the saddle.

"I am going to follow those fellows," he said; "I will be back presently."

"Why do you wish to follow them?" asked one of the youths.

"For the reason that I think they will be back before very long, with weapons in their hands and with considerable of an addition to their numbers."

"Oh, that's it, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then perhaps we had better stop dancing and go to our homes."

"That will be best and safest," said Dick; "and I will tell you what you may do after that."

"What?"

"Arm yourselves and come back here."

"Ah, I understand. You want that we shall be ready to give the redcoats some rough handling, if they try to cut up."

"Yes; they may get saucy and even threaten to harm these people here or burn the house."

"All right; we'll take the girls home and then arm ourselves and hurry back."

"Do so."

Then Dick galloped away on the track of the redcoats. By riding rapidly he was enabled to get close enough to hear the clatter of the horses' hoofs on the ground. He

not dare get close enough to see the redcoats as they had then have seen him. It was not a difficult matter, however, to keep on the track of the men by listening occasionally.

Dick was close enough to hear the sentinel's voice when he challenged the six redcoats, and the youth knew what it meant.

"The British encampment is just beyond," he said to himself; "I shall have to be very careful."

Dick dismounted and tied his horse to a tree; then he went forward and succeeded in getting past the sentinel and close up to the encampment.

He crawled up close to the point where Captain Sharples' men were encamped and heard the five telling their comrades the story of how they had been deprived of their weapons and how a young stranger had defeated the captain in a sword duel.

The hearers were greatly surprised.

"You don't really mean to tell us that a young stranger defeated the captain in a sword duel!" cried one, in wondering tones.

"That is just what we do mean to say, for it is the truth," was the reply.

"Well, that beats anything I ever heard of!"

"I would not have believed such a thing possible!"

"No, for the captain is one of the best swordsmen in the army."

"That's right; and he has beaten a number of men in duels."

"I know all that," was the reply; "but he is not to be compared to the young stranger in question. He is the best swordsman I ever saw. He had the captain at his mercy."

"Well, well! The young fellow must be some great fighter traveling through the country incognito."

"That is the conclusion we have come to," was the reply; "that he is some great rebel officer."

"Yes; and we are going to go back and capture him!" cried one of the others.

"Oh, you are, are you?" thought Dick. "I'm much obliged to you for telling me—though, for that matter, I thought you would be up to something of the kind."

"Who do you think he is?" asked one of the soldiers who had not been of the party of six.

"We can't even guess," was the reply; "but we think that we can capture him and bring him here we will be able to make him reveal his identity."

"Oh, you do, do you?" thought Dick. "Well, I will try to see to it that you don't bring me here."

"Then the captain has gone to ask Major Ferguson for permission to go and make the attempt to capture the stranger?"

"Yes."

"Jove! I hope the major will let him do it."

"So do I."

"I think he will do so."

"I guess he will."

"Well, it won't do him much good," thought Dick; "I will see to it that their expedition does not prove successful."

Then Dick got to wondering what the British force was doing up in this part of North Carolina. He had heard of Major Ferguson, and knew he was a brave, though somewhat rash and hot-headed officer.

Dick took a careful survey of the encampment and sized it up.

"There must be upward of one thousand men here," he said to himself. "That is quite a respectable little army, and I can't understand why such a large force should be here."

Presently Captain Sharples came back from the tent of Major Ferguson, and Dick heard him tell his men that he had secured permission to return and make the attempt to capture the young stranger. Dick waited only long enough to learn that the captain would have twenty men, and then he stole away, and, reaching his horse, mounted and rode away in the direction of the house where the dance had been held.

He was there in less than half an hour, for he rode at a good pace and he was delighted to find the youths there waiting for him. There were twelve of them and they were armed with rifles and pistols.

"Did you follow them clear to their encampment?" asked one of the youths, eagerly. He was the one with whom Dick had held the conversation in the house when the dancing was going on and whose name Dick had learned was Eugene Banks.

"Yes, I followed them to their camp," replied Dick.

"And what did you find out?"

"That they are going to try to capture me."

"Ah! they are going to try to capture you, are they?"

"Yes; and a party of the redcoats is on its way here now."

"Is that so?"

"Great guns!"

"A party of redcoats coming here?"

"How big a party is it, Dick?"

"There are twenty-one in the party."

"Twenty-one? And we are only thirteen!"

"True; but we will be more than a match for them."

"How can we be? They outnumber us almost two to one."

"Yes, but that doesn't amount to much when you take into consideration the fact that we will be enabled to take them by surprise."

"So that's the way you intend to work it, eh?"

"Yes."

"That's a good scheme."

"I think so; but now, are you boys willing to do just as I tell you?"

"We are!" The answer was prompt and was in a chorus of voices.

"In every way?"

"Yes."

"Very good; then we must get ready to act. Come with me."

Dick led the way along the road a distance of a hundred yards and then he turned aside and entered the timber. He did not penetrate any distance, however, but paused just within the edge of the timber.

"This is a splendid place for an ambush," he said.

"It is just the place for it," agreed Eugene Banks.

"Are you boys pretty good shots?" asked Dick.

"Yes, pretty good."

"I suppose you can bring down a squirrel or a wild turkey out of the top of a high tree?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, it will be no trouble for you to hit as large a mark as a man."

"Not if we don't get excited and nervous."

"That is something you must not permit to happen."

"We will try not to do so."

"You must make up your minds that you will not permit it to happen."

"We'll do our best, eh, boys?"

"Yes, yes!"

"It is a very simple matter when you come to look at it rightly," said Dick; "a man is just as easy to bring down as a squirrel or turkey. Remember that and take careful aim; and when you fire you will be surprised by the result. One volley should easily bring down half the entire force of the enemy, and then we will outnumber them."

"I see," said Eugene; "and we will still have the advantage of the shelter afforded by the trees and underbrush, while they will be out in the open road."

"You are right. So remember to take aim carefully

as the redcoats come down the road, and when I give word, fire."

"We will do so."

"And when you have fired the volley with the rifles, draw them and draw your pistols and fire a volley with the

"Very well."

Dick arranged the youths in such fashion that they would not interfere with each other in taking aim, and they waited for the enemy to put in an appearance. Dick hoped they would not have to wait long; and he did not think it would, as he was sure the redcoats would be along soon.

He was right; they had not been in their position more than two or three minutes when the sound of hoofbeats was heard.

"They are coming!" said Dick. "Now remember what I told you. Don't be nervous, for there is not a bit of danger of it. We will be able to put them to rout, and without one of us being injured, I am confident."

"All right; we'll keep cool," replied Eugene.

Clatter! clatter! sounded the hoofs of the horses, and then the party rode around a bend in the road a hundred yards distant and came into view.

"Wait till the leading couple is even with us," said Dick in a cautious voice, "and then I will give the signal for us to fire."

The youths nodded assent, and leveling their rifles, with their elbows resting on their left knees, waited for the redcoats to come opposite them.

Presently the enemy was almost at the point and the youths took careful aim. The redcoats were quiet, as the captain knew they were almost to the house where the danger had been held, and did not wish to raise an alarm and give the youth they intended to capture a chance to escape. When they came opposite where the youths were in hiding, an exclamation of disappointment escaped the captain.

"The house is not lighted up!" he cried. "What does that mean?"

He was soon to learn, for at this moment on the hill rose the sharp command:

"Fire!"

Then a volley rang out and nine of the redcoats tumbled out of their saddles.

CHAPTER VI.

SHELBY AND HIS MEN.

"Ha! what does that mean?"

A party consisting of perhaps two hundred men

making its way along a road in the western part of North Carolina, not far from the Catawba River. The leader of this party was a tall, raw-boned man, with a stern face, and it was he who had uttered the exclamation. This man was Isaac Shelby, one of the most noted patriot partisan leaders in the South.

"It was the sound of firing, sir," said a man who walked beside the tall leader. This man was John Sevier, almost as prominent as Shelby, but at present occupying the position of second in command.

"So it was; I wonder what it means?"

"Hard telling."

"You are right—ah, there is another volley, and from pistols this time!"

"Yes, and the other was from rifles."

"You are right; there is no mistaking the sound made by the old North Carolina deer rifle."

"You speak truly; but there were at least a dozen of the weapons fired off at once, and so much shooting would not be done in the ordinary course of hunting."

"No; there's a fight of some kind on the tapis."

"Yes, it would seem so."

"How far away do you think the people are?"

"I should say three-quarters of a mile."

"I should say so; let us hasten. Perhaps some of our people are in trouble."

"No," was the reply; "if it is a fight of any kind it is the other fellows who are in trouble, for we have not heard any reply to the volleys."

"Perhaps the pistol volley was in reply to the rifle volley."

"True, that is possible."

"Then let us hasten."

"I am willing."

Shelby turned to the men and called out: "Forward, on the double-quick, men! You heard the firing, and it may be that friends of ours, or of the cause for which we are fighting, are in need of assistance."

The party made its way along on the double-quick, and ten minutes later arrived at the scene of the firing. They knew when they were at the scene, for on the ground were stretched the forms of eight or nine dead British dragoons, while four or five more were groaning from wounds.

"Halt!" cried Isaac Shelby. "There has been trouble here, sure enough, Sevier," he said as his force came to a stop; "and judging by appearances the redcoats have got the worst of the encounter."

"It would certainly seem so," replied Sevier; "but I wonder what has become of the party that did this work?"

"It is right here," said a voice, and the two whirled to see a young man step forth from among the trees at the roadside.

"Ha! who are you?" exclaimed Shelby, eyeing the young man searchingly as he approached. There was such a brilliant moon that it was possible to see almost as well as in the daytime.

"Come up the road a little ways with me and I will tell you," the youth replied.

"Why not tell me now and here?" in a slightly suspicious tone.

Dick motioned toward the wounded redcoats. "I don't wish them to know who I am," he said, in a low voice.

The partisan commander nodded and strode up the road, Dick keeping alongside him. When they were out of earshot of the wounded redcoats they stopped.

"Now," said Shelby.

"You asked me who I was, back yonder," said Dick, "and I did not reply because I did not wish the wounded redcoats to hear my name and carry the information to their commander."

"So I understand," was the reply. "And now, who are you?"

"I am Dick Slater."

"What! Not the captain of the 'Liberty Boys'?"

"Yes, sir."

"But I thought Dick Slater and the 'Liberty Boys' were a thousand miles from here, away up North."

"And that is what I wish the redcoats to think, sir; that is the reason I did not wish to speak my name in their hearing. I think that I shall be able to do more if it is not known that I am in this part of the country."

"Undoubtedly you are right."

"I am sure of it."

"But your 'Liberty Boys'—where are they?"

"They are down here."

"Are they right here with you?"

"No."

"Then who shot the redcoats?"

"A dozen young men of the neighborhood—young patriots."

"Ah, I understand. But what was the trouble? How came you to get into a difficulty with the redcoats?"

Dick quickly explained matters.

"Oh, that is the way of it, eh?"

"Yes."

"But where are the 'Liberty Boys,' if not here with you?"

"They are about ten miles back. I left them encamped and rode forward on a sort of scouting expedition."

"I see. But how large a force of British is the one to which those fellows back there belong?"

"Ah, now you are getting to the point!" said Dick. "I was at their camp an hour ago and sized it up. I should say that there are more than one thousand men."

"More than a thousand?"

"Yes."

"Jove! that's quite a little army!"

"So it is."

"Who is in command of it, do you know?"

"Major Patrick Ferguson."

"I have heard of him."

"Yes, so have I."

"Now, what do you suppose he is doing away up here with such a large force?"

"I don't know of a certainty, of course, but I think I can give a good guess regarding the business which brings him here."

"What is it?"

"He is hunting up Tories and getting them to join his force; at least that is the idea I have regarding the matter."

"Quite likely you are right."

"I am sure of it."

Shelby was silent for a few moments and seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Wouldn't it be a great thing if we could entrap this fellow Ferguson and destroy and capture his force!" he remarked, presently.

"It would, indeed!" agreed Dick; "but we haven't enough men, have we?"

"No, we haven't, but——"

"How many men have you?" asked Dick.

"Two hundred."

"I have one hundred; that is three, but three hundred could hardly hope to be successful against a thousand or more."

"True; but I think I know something that will simplify matters and make it possible for us to do this thing."

"You do?" eagerly.

"Yes; I happen to know that over west, about twenty miles, in the vicinity of Gilbert Town, a large party of patriots is even now being gathered, and in a few days James Williams will be there with at least four thousand men; William Campbell, of Virginia, and Benjamin Cleveland and Charles McDowell, of North Carolina, with five hundred men, will be gathered there also and the nine hun-

dred, with our three hundred, will make a force that will be wholly capable of coping with this force of redcoats."

"Yes," said Dick; "but the trouble will be to get the redcoats to go there."

"I think we can easily fix that."

"How?"

"By using my little force as bait to draw them on."

"Ah, I see."

"This Major Ferguson, if all I hear of him is true, will be just the fellow to give chase to us, don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do; and he will be angry on account of the way we handled those men of his, and will be eager to get revenge."

"That is what I think."

"I'll tell you what we will do," said Dick; "I will say in the hearing of the wounded redcoats, that I am going to go with your force and you can say something about going to the westward, toward Gilbert Town; then it will be carried to Major Ferguson, and he will be after us, hot foot."

"That is a good plan, for he will be more likely to want to follow us if he knows you, who are responsible for the death and wounding of his men, are with us."

"You are right; well, if you are ready we will return to where they are awaiting us."

"Perhaps it will be best for the young men who did this work to not show themselves," suggested Isaac Shelby; "you see, in that way the redcoats will think the damage was done by outsiders, and will not be so likely to injure any of the patriot people of this vicinity."

"True; I will go and tell them to disperse and go to their homes."

"That will be best."

They walked back, and while Shelby rejoined his force Dick entered the timber and calling the youths back explained the situation to them.

"Now, as I shall accompany these men to the westward it is as well that you go home," he said, in conclusion. "I came down here to find work, and now that I have found it I will attend to it."

"Let me go with you, Dick?" pleaded Eugene Banks.

"And I want to go, too!" from another.

The others took it up and all were eager to accompany the patriots on their trip toward Gilbert Town. Dick explained that there would probably be some hot fighting to do, and this prospect seemed to make the youths all the more eager.

Finding that the youths were eager and determined, Dick finally said: "I'll tell you what we will do: You go home and ask permission of your parents, and if they are willed

for you to go, all right. You can join us four or five miles west of here. How does that suit you?"

The youths said it suited them first rate, and after a few more words they dispersed and hastened away in the direction of their homes to ask their parents to let them go with the patriot force.

Dick then returned to the road and joined the patriot force.

"What are you going to do, Mr. Shelby?" he asked. "Which way are you going from here?"

"We are on our way to Gilbert Town," was the reply.

"Ah, yes; how far is that from here?"

"A little more than twenty miles."

"Very well; if you don't object I think I will go with you."

"I shall be glad to have you go with us; and your men—the ones who did this," pointing to the dead and wounded redcoats.

"Oh, yes, certainly."

"How many men have you?"

"Twelve."

"Oh, well, twelve is just that many more and we will be glad to have them go with us."

"All right; but now what shall we do with these?" pointing to the dead and wounded.

"We will let the dead lie where they are; the wounded we will make as comfortable as possible and leave them alone."

"But they may lie here and suffer all night, and die for lack of care."

"I don't think so; their comrades will be back in an hour or so and look after them. We can't lose valuable men by bothering with them, at any rate."

"Likely you are right; I never thought of that, but your friends will certainly come and look after them."

"I am sure they will."

"It did not take long to do all that was possible for the wounded men, and then the patriot force took its departure, going toward the west. Dick accompanied them for a short distance, and then mounting his horse bade Mr. Shelby and Sevier good-by and rode away, promising to be back in them before morning with his "Liberty Boys."

Dick rode onward toward the east, an hour and a half, when he reached the camp of the "Liberty Boys." He passed Bob Estabrook and explained the situation to him. Bob was Dick's right-hand man, and was eager and excited when told that there was a good prospect for lively times in the near future.

"We will get the boys up, break camp and go and join Shelby's force, Dick!" he said.

"I think that will be the thing to do, Bob; in fact, I told Shelby we would join them before morning."

"That was right; I'll rouse the boys at once."

Bob and Dick both went to work and soon had the "Liberty Boys" woke up. It did not take long to place the youths in possession of a knowledge of the situation, and they rolled up their blankets, bridled and saddled their horses, and within half an hour of the time Dick arrived there the entire force was riding away toward the west, bent on joining the patriot force under Shelby and Sevier.

CHAPTER VII.

MAJOR FERGUSON DECIDES TO FOLLOW.

When the force of twenty men, under Captain Sharpley, were fired upon by Dick Slater and the twelve youths, from the trees at the side of the road, the redcoats were taken entirely by surprise and were almost paralyzed with amazement—that is, those who were not killed were.

As we have said, nine men tumbled out of their saddles to the ground and seven of these were dead, the other two being wounded. Then came the pistol volley, and some more of the men tumbled to the ground.

This was too much, and the little remnant of the band turned and fled at top speed. The redcoats felt confident that to remain would be but to cause them to lose their lives.

They continued onward till they reached the encampment, and Captain Sharpley, much as he disliked the task, went to the tent and reported to Major Ferguson.

The major was furious. His hot blood was quickly made hotter still, and he fairly raved for a few moments; then he cooled down sufficiently to talk, and asked the captain for the details.

These were few and easily given, and then the major said:

"Take your entire company, captain, and return to that place immediately. Scour the timber all around, and if you get a chance at those scoundrels, kill them without mercy; you understand?"

"Yes, major; and I will start at once."

"Do so; Jove! to think that soldiers of the king should be waylaid and shot down like dogs! It makes me wild to think of it!"

"So does it me, major. I am eager to get revenge."

"Well, go at once and get it."

"I will do so."

"You should be able to do so without trouble; for there cannot be more than a dozen or so of the rebels."

"I don't think there is to exceed that number, but they are dangerous, for the reason that they are good shots."

"Well, they will not dare show fight against your entire company."

"No, I suppose not."

"I know they will not; they will not dare do it. I am only afraid that you will be unable to set eyes on them."

"I have fears on that score, too; you see, they are people who are used to the lay of the land and know all the ins and outs of the timber."

"Yes, and no doubt they know where there are good hiding places."

"I fear that such is the case."

"Well, do the best you can."

"I will, sir."

Then the captain took his departure, and returning to his quarters, ordered his men to get ready for the road at once. They obeyed, and fifteen minutes later the entire company rode out of the encampment and away in the direction of the place where the redcoats had been ambushed and shot down.

It took less than half an hour to reach the spot, and the men dismounted and turned their attention to the wounded men. The captain questioned one of these, who happened to be not seriously wounded.

"Did you see the men who did this?" he asked.

"We saw the leader of the gang."

"You did?" eagerly.

"Yes."

"And who was he, Mortimer?"

"He was the fellow you fought the duel with."

"I thought so!" the captain exclaimed. "I was sure of it."

"Yes, it was that fellow, and no one else."

"And you did not see the men who were with him and who did the work?"

"No."

"They didn't show themselves, eh?"

"No; but I know how many there were."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"How did you find out?"

"I heard him say how many there were."

"Ah, and what was the number?"

"Twelve."

The captain nodded. "That is just about the number guessed," he said. Then a thought struck him.

"But how did the fellow happen to tell you this?" asked.

"He didn't tell me."

"He didn't?"

"No."

"Who, then?"

"Another rebel."

"Another rebel?"

"Yes."

"But I thought you said you did not see the rest of the gang."

"We didn't; there was another gang of rebels happening along."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"How big a gang?"

"You'll be surprised when I tell you."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Well, how many men were there in this second gang?"

"Two hundred!"

An exclamation of astonishment escaped the lips of the captain.

"You don't mean it?" he cried.

"But I do. There were two hundred of the rebels who heard them say so themselves."

"Great guns! I wonder what they are doing in part of the country?"

"I don't know; but I know where they are going."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"They are headed for Gilbert Town, twenty miles the westward."

"Ah! that's up in the mountains."

"Yes."

"Did you hear them say why they were going there?"

"No."

The captain was silent, thinking, for a few moments, then he said:

"This is important, and we must carry the new Major Ferguson as soon as possible."

"Yes, I think so."

"He may wish to strike this gang of rebels."

"I am pretty sure he will wish to do so."

"Have you any idea what particular gang this is?"

"I know the name of the leader."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"How did you learn it?"

"I heard the fellow you fought the duel with call him by name."

"Ah! and what was the name?"

"Shelby."

The captain started. "I have heard of him," he said; "he is one of the most prominent rebel partisans in this part of the country."

"So I suspected."

"Yes; and Major Ferguson will be wild to get at him and his gang."

"That is what I think."

"There is no doubt regarding the matter. Well, we will get to work and bury the boys who are dead and then will make arrangements to get the wounded to the encampment."

The captain hastened away and gave orders to his men, and soon they were at work digging a trench with their swords. Many hands make light labor, and even with such poor tools as swords it did not take long to dig a trench long and deep enough to hold the bodies of their dead comrades.

This done the bodies were placed in the trench and covered over with dirt. Then hammock ambulances were made by tying blankets between horses, and the wounded men were placed in the blankets and the party started back to the encampment.

Leaving the main party to follow at as rapid a pace as was possible under the circumstances, Captain Sharpley rode onward at a gallop and reached the camp ahead of the company.

He went at once to the tent occupied by Major Ferguson, who was lying down on a cot, but was not undressed.

"Well, how is it, captain?" he asked, sitting up and looking at his visitor questioningly. "Did you find the rascally rebels and wipe them off the face of the earth?"

"No, we did not find them, major. Indeed, we did not look for them."

The major stared.

"Did not look for them?" he murmured.

"No."

"How is that? Did I not tell you to do so?"

"Yes, but I learned something from one of the wounded men that caused me to change my plans."

"Ah! so that is it, eh?"

"Yes."

"What did you learn?"

The captain told him as briefly as possible.

"Great guns!" exclaimed the major, when the other had finished; "here is a chance to strike a blow that the scoundrelly rebels will remember for a while."

"That is what I think, sir."

"Yes, there is no doubt about it; we have a good chance now, and all we have to do is to improve it."

"You suppose there is no trap in the affair?" remarked Captain Sharpley.

The major shook his head.

"I am confident there is not," he said; "you see, they don't know that I am here with a strong force, and so did not hesitate to talk in the hearing of the wounded men."

The captain nodded.

"That is the way I look at it," he said; "but still, I thought it would do no harm to say something."

"Certainly not; you did right in speaking of the suspicion which was in your mind. I think, however, that the rebels have no idea there is a strong British force in the vicinity, and, being confident of their own strength, were careless."

"I think it more than likely that you are right."

"I am sure of it."

"Then you will follow this rebel force and strike it?"

"I shall do that very thing."

"Good! that will give us revenge for the killing and wounding of our men to-night."

"So it will."

"Will you start on their trail to-night?"

"No; we will remain here and break camp at daylight and start."

"I judge that will be best; as then we will be able to see what we are about."

"Yes; and I don't think the rebels will march far to-night, anyway."

"Probably not; but why would it not be a good plan to go and attack them at once?"

"They will be on their guard to-night."

"True."

"Yes, but to-morrow night they will not think that there is danger and we will be able to surround them and take them by surprise and annihilate the entire force."

"I believe that you are right."

"I am sure of it."

"That will be fine!" said the captain. "We will get that young scoundrel that caused all the trouble."

"The fellow who defeated you in the duel, eh?"

"Yes. Jove! I'd like to see him hang!"

"Well, I may turn him over to you to do what you please with."

"I wish you would."

The major and the captain were certainly counting their chickens before they were hatched, but they did not know it, and talked for nearly an hour, laying their plans. Then the captain took his departure and went to his own quarters.

He found the wounded men in their places and resting as easy as could be expected. Then after a few words with Mortimer he lay down and was soon asleep.

The men were aroused at daylight next morning, and after eating breakfast, bridled and saddled their horses—the two hundred dragoons did—and soon the entire force was moving. Of course, the gait had to be suited to the infantry, and so they did not travel very fast. Still, it would be possible, the major thought, to almost cover the twenty miles during the day.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SIGNAL ON THE MOUNTAIN.

Dick Slater and the "Liberty Boys" rode onward steadily for two hours. They were new to the country, but thought they would have no difficulty in finding their way.

They were to learn, however, that in this they were wrong. Although they thought they were going right, they went too far to the right and were gradually getting farther and farther away from the force under Shelby and Sevier.

Dick was on the lookout, too, for the twelve youths who had done such good work under his leadership, but saw nothing of them. The reason of this was because the "Liberty Boys" had went too far to the northward, the youths having followed the main force under Shelby.

At last, when they had been riding several hours, Dick called a halt.

"I think we have wandered away off the track of Shelby's force, boys," he said; "so we will go into camp here and wait for daylight."

The "Liberty Boys" were quite willing to do anything Dick said, and they dismounted, tethered their horses, and rolling themselves in their blankets were soon fast asleep.

They were up bright and early next morning and after partaking of a frugal breakfast, mounted and started.

Dick felt confident that they would be able to rejoin the patriot force under Shelby, soon, but as hour after hour passed and no sign of their friends could be seen, and as they found themselves getting deeper and deeper into the mountains and wilderness, he became somewhat less sanguine.

"Jove! I don't know what to think, old man," he said to Bob Estabrook; "it begins to look as if we are lost."

"You are right, Dick," was the reply; "I don't believe we are going right, to reach Gilbert Town."

"Neither do I. It seems as if we were leaving what little of civilization there is in this part of the country and plunging into the wilderness."

"You are right; we haven't seen a settler's cabin to-day."

"Not one."

"What are we to do?"

"I guess we might as well continue onward, going as nearly in the right direction as we know how, and trust to luck to get somewhere."

"I suppose that is as good luck as anything; but I fear we will not get with Shelby soon enough to have the fun of helping whip the British."

"I'm afraid we may be too late."

"Well, we can't help it."

"No."

"I wish we could find a settler's cabin; then we could find out where we are."

"So we could; perhaps we will come across one presently."

"I hope we may."

But they did not. They continued onward, steadily, till high noon, and then paused to eat their frugal lunch and let the horses rest and have a chance to eat some grass. While eating the youths talked the situation over, but could not figure out their whereabouts.

"Well," said Dick, finally, "we will have to keep on as we have been going; doing the best we know how and trust to our good fortune to get out of the wilderness."

"That is all we can do," said Mark Morrison.

"Unless we are so fortunate as to find a settler somewhere and get him to show us the way out of here."

"We may do that."

"I hope so."

The youths mounted their horses and rode onward, all the rest of the day, and late in the evening came upon the cabin of a settler. The cabin nestled in a little valley at the very foot of the mountains, and the sight of the homely log house was very pleasing.

"Hurrah!" cried Bob Estabrook. "Now we will be able to find out where we are."

"You are right," agreed Dick.

"And we may be able to get something to eat, too," added Bob.

"Quite likely."

The "Liberty Boys" rode up in front of the cabin and came to a stop.

"Hello!" called out Dick.

There was the sound of footsteps within the cabin, and then a woman of perhaps forty years, and a girl of seven or eighteen years appeared in the open doorway. The two stared at the "Liberty Boys" in wondering amazement, not unmixed with fright.

"W-who air ye?" the woman stammered. "An' whut ye want?"

"We are friends," said Dick, reassuringly; "and have our way."

"Whur wuz ye wantin' ter go?"

"To Gilbert Town."

"Ter Gilbert Town?"

"Yes."

"Waal, ye've shorely got considible outer yer way, ster."

"I am afraid so. How far is it to Gilbert Town?"

"Et's erbout fifteen miles."

"Fifteen miles!"

"Yas."

The youths turned blank faces toward one another.

"Great guns!" exclaimed Bob; "we're almost as far from our destination as we were this time yesterday mornin'."

"You are right," agreed Dick.

"Which direction do we have to go in order to reach Gilbert Town?" asked Sam Sanderson.

"In thet direckshun," pointing toward the mountain.

The youths looked blanker than ever.

"Do we have to cross the mountain?" asked Dick.

"Yas."

"Is there no way this can be avoided?"

"On'y by goin' erbout er hunderd miles."

A groan went up from the "Liberty Boys."

"We're in for it, Dick!" said Bob.

"I guess we are," the youth acknowledged; then to the man: "Can you direct us so that we can find our way to the mountain?"

The woman shook her head. "Direckshuns wouldn't do good," she replied.

"You think we could not follow them, eh?"

"Thet's whut I think. Nobuddy c'u'd git over them mountings without knowin' ther path."

"Then perhaps we can get your husband to guide us over?"

The woman shook her head. "He hain't ter hum," she said.

"Where is he?"

"He went ter Gilbert Town this mornin'."

"When will he be back?"

"Ter-morrer evenin'."

The youths looked at one another in a disgusted manner.

"Great guns! are we to have to stay here till then?" asked Bob.

The girl, who had as yet said nothing but had kept her eyes on the youths, now said something to the woman, in a low tone, and the woman started and after hesitating a few moments, said:

"My darter Emmy sez ez how she c'u'd guide ye over ther mounting."

"That is just the thing!" exclaimed Dick. "That will do as well as if her father did the work. We shall be very much obliged if she will act as our guide."

"I can do it as well as not," the girl said, her voice being musical and sweet; "there isn't anything for me to do at home, and I might as well be doing something as not."

"Good!" said Dick; "and we can start as soon as we have had supper."

The girl stepped out and took a look up at the sky and then shook her head.

"It wouldn't be safe to start," she said.

"Why not?" exclaimed Dick, in surprise.

"Because we are going to have a storm."

"A storm?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"By the looks. Don't you see the cloud just coming up over the top of the mountain?"

"Yes."

"Well, I can tell by the looks of that cloud that we will have a storm to-night, and it would be bad to be caught up on the mountain at night, and in a storm."

"Is the path hard to follow?"

"Yes; and then we have such terrible storms on the mountain."

"What shall we do, then?" asked Dick, disconsolately.

"We will have to wait till morning before starting."

"You think the storm will be over by that time?"

"Yes; and we will be sure, then, of getting safely over the mountain; if we were to start to-night we might get

lost and wander for days without being able to find our way out of the wilderness."

"Is it so impenetrable as that?"

"Yes; we have lived here for years, and father has never been able to find more than one path that will lead one over the mountain and through the wilderness."

"Well, there is only one thing for us to do, I suppose," said Dick, "and that is to settle down here for the night."

"Can you furnish us something in the way of food, madam?" asked Bob.

"Yas," the woman replied; "we hev plenty, sech ez it is."

"Oh, it'll be all right, I guess. What have you?"

"We hev plenty uv hog meat an' venison; an' we hev plenty uv cornmeal fur ter make hoe cakes."

"That will be fine!" cried Bob. "Say, boys, let's hurry, for I am nearly starved."

It did not take long to attend to the horses and then the youths went to work to cook their supper over a fire built on the ground in front of the cabin. The woman and girl cooked all they could in the house and the "Liberty Boys" had a meal that put them in a good humor, in spite of the fact that they knew they were miles out of their way and might miss the battle with the British.

"We may get there in time, after all," said Dick.

"I hope so," said Bob; "I would hate to miss it."

They had learned that the settler and his wife and daughter were patriots, and so had no hesitancy in talking right out before the two. Their name was Simmons, the woman's being Martha, and the girl's, Emma, while they spoke of the husband and father as being Joe.

By the time supper was over the sky was overcast with clouds, and the flash of lightning and the distant rumble of thunder could be seen and heard.

"You were right, Miss Emma," said Dick; "we are going to have a storm, sure enough."

"I know the signs," with a smile; "the signs never fail here."

"Well, I am glad we have found some place to stay, anyway," said Bob. Estabrook.

"And so am I!" remarked Frank Wilson; and the other youths noticed that the speaker's eyes were resting admiringly on the pretty face of Emma Simmons as he spoke.

"Say, I believe Frank's in love with that girl already!" said Bob to Dick, in a low tone, and Dick nodded.

"It looks like it," he replied, with a smile. "Well, she is a very pretty girl, and a bright one, too."

"Yes; one would not expect to find such a bright girl away out here in the wilds."

"You are right. I have an idea she has relatives in some town, and has lived there with them and thus secured a very good education."

"Perhaps that is the way of it."

This was indeed the case, as they learned later. Emma Simmons had relatives in Gilbert Town, and had lived there four winters, and had acquired a very good education for those times.

Closer and closer came the storm; it would soon break and the woman and girl urged the youths to come in the house.

"Will it hold all of us?" asked Dick.

"Oh, yes," replied Emma; "there are three rooms, all good size, and while you will be crowded a bit yet it will be better than to stay out in the rain."

"Yes, indeed," replied Dick, and then all went into the house. They were somewhat crowded, as the girl had said they would be, but they were more comfortable than they would have been out of doors, for it rained very hard. In fact, it virtually poured down for three or four hours.

The youths finally spread their blankets on the floor and lay down and went to sleep; the woman and girl going to a little room in the upper part of the main building. It was nothing more than a loft, but there was plenty of room for the two, and this left the entire downstairs for the use of the "Liberty Boys."

When morning came it was found that the storm had spent itself long ago. The ground was wet, but the sun came up clear and would soon dry everything.

The youths ate breakfast, and filled their saddle-bags with hoe cakes and cooked venison and hog meat, and then they were ready for the start. They offered to pay Mrs. Simmons for the food they had eaten and were carrying away, but she refused to accept anything.

"Ye air welcum," she said; "we air patriots, an' air glad ter be able ter do er little sumthin' ter help the cause."

"It is certainly very kind of you," said Dick; "and to let your daughter go with us as guide, too; that is doing us a great favor and one which I assure you we appreciate."

"Oh, that is all right; she wants ter go."

So the "Liberty Boys" set out, and with the girl to guide them, managed to find the way up the mountain and over its top. When they had gone perhaps one-third of the way down the other side they met a man coming up the pathway.

"It's father!" the girl exclaimed.

The man was a stalwart six-footer, dressed in the rough clothing of the settler of the region; his face was honest and good-natured, however, and although he was undoubtedly greatly surprised to see his daughter, he called out, pleasantly:

"Hullo, Emma! Whur ye goin'?"

"I am guiding these men over the mountain, father," was the reply.

"So I see; but who air they?"

"We are 'The Liberty Boys of '76,' sir," said Dick, stepping forward.

"Oho! ther 'Liberty Boys,' hey?" the man exclaimed.

"Waal, I'm glad ter know ye. I've heerd tell uv ye so much thet et seems a'most ez ef I do know ye."

"And we are glad to know you, Mr. Simmons," said Dick; "your wife and daughter told us that you are a patriot, so that is the reason I told you who we are."

"I see."

"You are on your way home from Gilbert Town, I believe?" asked Dick.

"Yas."

"Did you see or hear anything of the patriot forces that were to gather there?"

The man nodded.

"Yas, I seen Shelby an' Sevier an' theer men; an' Williams an' his men; an' Campbell, Cleveland an' McDowell an' theer men."

"Ah! They were at Gilbert Town, you say?"

"Yas."

"And did you see or hear anything of the British force under Major Ferguson?"

"Yas; I heerd uv 'em an' seen em', too."

"Where did you see them?"

"Erbout three miles this side uv Gilbert Town."

"When did you see them?"

"Erbout ten o'clock this mornin'."

"What were they doing?"

"Nothin'."

"Nothing?"

"They wuz halted an' seemed ter be at er loss ter know whut ter do."

"Ah! I wonder why that was?"

"I think they hed jes' heerd tell, frum er Tory who hed cum inter ther camp, thet ther patriot forces wuz gatherin' erhead."

"Oh, that was it?"

"Yas."

"Likely you are right."

"I'm party shore I am, fur they axed me er lot uv questions."

"They did?"

"Yas; they wanted ter know ef I hed seen enny rebels ennywhurs aroun' Gilbert Town."

"What did you tell them?"

"I told them I hed seen wun party uv erbout two hundred men."

"What did they say to that?"

"They seemed ter be er little bit suspishus, an' axed me ef I hedn't seen more than thet."

"What did you answer?"

"Thet I hedn't seen enny more."

"Did they seem to still doubt you?"

"Yas; but uv course they couldn' prove thet I wuzn't tellin' ther trooth, an' they finally let me go."

"Then you came on?"

"Yas."

"And you don't know what they decided to do?"

"No."

"I wish you had remained in the vicinity long enough to have seen what they did."

"I kinder wush't I hed, now; but uv course I didn' expek ter meet ye; in fack, I never thort thet I'd heer ennythin' more erbout 'em."

"True; well, somehow I am inclined to think that the British decided to turn back."

"Et's likely; fur I'm shore ther Tory hed tole 'em er big yarn erbout theer bein' er big force uv patriots at Gilbert Town."

"Jove! I wish I knew for certain whether they turned back."

"If we could only get somewhere where we could see out we would be all right," said Bob; "but we are in such a wilderness here that it is impossible to see anywhere."

"True," agreed Dick.

"I know whur is er place ye could go, frum where ye could git er splendid view uv all their country round," said Mr. Simmons; "et's on ther top uv Bald Mountain, an' frum theer ye kin see Gilbert Town on er cl'ar day."

"How long would it take us to get there?" asked Dick.

"Erbout three hours; but when ye git theer ye will be cluss ter ther road ther redecoats will hev ter travel in gittin' back out uv this part uv ther country, an' ye will be in er persishun ter jine their patriot force when it comes erlong."

"Then we will go there at once; that is, if you will go with us and guide us thither."

"Oh, I'll be glad ter do thet much fur ther cause."

"Good! Then to Bald Mountain we will go."

"May I go with you, father?" asked Emma.

The man hesitated.

"Please let me go," the girl pleaded. "Maybe I can be of use in some way, father, and I would hate to have to walk clear back home by myself, anyway."

"Thet's so; ye mought git clawed er chawed by er painter er wildcat ef ye went back erlone. Waal, ye may come erlong an' then ye kin go back when I go."

"Thank you, father; I would much rather not go back alone." The immediate chums and best friends of Frank Wilson noticed that there was a pleased look on his face when it was decided that Emma was to go with them. It was evident that the handsome and bright young "Liberty Boy" had taken a great liking to the beautiful backwoods girl.

"You lead the way and we will follow, Mr. Simmons," said Dick.

"All right," was the reply; and then the man set out at a good pace, down the path. The girl followed him, and after her came Dick, Bob and the rest of the youths, all walking and leading their horses.

As the man had said it would, it took them nearly three hours to reach the top of Bald Mountain, but when they got there the youths were delighted. It was possible to see miles in every direction, and if the redcoats were anywhere in the vicinity it would be an easy matter to locate them.

The horses were left about two hundred yards down from the top of the mountain, in the timber which grew there, but did not extend farther up, the top being really bald, with the exception of two or three trees which had managed to get a foothold amid the rocks.

Fearing that they might be seen if too many went up, Dick ordered the youths to remain where the horses were, with the exception of Bob Estabrook, and then the two "Liberty Boys," in company with Mr. Simmons and Emma, made their way to the summit and began looking for the British.

It was now pretty well along toward evening, was five o'clock, in fact, but nowhere could any signs of the British be seen. The four looked long and searchingly, and failing, they went back down to where the youths were and all ate supper with a relish, for the long and tiresome tramp over the mountain had made them very hungry.

As soon as supper was over the four returned to the top of the mountain, as there remained not much more of sunlight, the sun being well down toward the western

horizon, and if they were to get sight of the British would have to be done very soon.

They had been there but a few moments when they caught sight of the advance guard of the British. It came in sight a mile or so distant and came along at a moderate pace.

"I ruther think they'll go inter camp purty soon," said Mr. Simmons.

"Why do you think so?" asked Dick.

"W'y, ye see, et's arter sundown, down whur they are, an' et'll soon be gittin' dark, an' I think they'll go inter camp."

"That is a reasonable supposition; I had not thought that."

"Yes; see, they have halted now," said the girl.

This was true; the British had come to a stop, and was seen that they were at a point where there was a large open place which would answer nicely for a camping ground.

"Yes, they are going to go into camp," said Bob.

The men were seen stacking their arms, and presently when the dragoons appeared, they dismounted and tethered their horses, first unbridling and unsaddling them.

"We are in luck," said Dick; "we are where we can keep watch on the enemy and yet not be seen ourselves."

"Do you suppose that Shelby and the rest of the partisan commanders know that the British have turned back?" asked Bob.

"That is a hard question to answer," said Dick, thoughtfully; "I'm a bit inclined to doubt it. What do you think, Mr. Simmons?"

"I have doubts erbout the patriots knowin' uv et," was the reply.

"On what do you base your doubts?"

"W'y, I happen ter know thet the patriots wuz waitin' back er mile out uv Gilbert Town, an' wuz expectin' the British ter cum inter ther town, when they intended to surroun' ther place an' coop ther enemy up. Ye see, they would natcherly wait an' wait, and et might be thet they wouldn' suspek nothin' even ef ther redecoats didn't go theer durin' ther day."

"I have an idea that you are right, and when they look for the British and find them gone they won't know where to look for them, will they?"

"I don' think they will, fur ther reezon thet when the redecoats went ter Gilbert Town they went over er road thet runs almos' parallel with this wun, but is five miles ter ther southard, an' our friend's 'll natcherly think the hev gone back ther same way, an'll miss 'em."

"That is bad," said Dick; "if they lose time going on the southern road the redcoats will escape."

"Thet's jes' whut they'll do."

"Jove! that will be too bad!" said Bob. "I wish there was some way we could get the information to our friends that the redcoats are here."

"I have an idea, Bob!" exclaimed Dick.

"What is it?"

All three looked eagerly at Dick, who said:

"I'll tell you: What is the reason we can't build a big bonfire on the top of this mountain as soon as it is dark, and let it be a signal to our friends that the enemy is here?"

"I think thet would be er good skeem," said Mr. Simons.

"So do I," said Emma; "it will be a signal to them, and all they will have to do is to travel straight toward it."

"It will be a beacon light, leading them to the point where the redcoats are stationed," said Bob.

"There is one drawback to it," said Dick.

"What is that?" from Bob.

"The enemy will see it and will be suspicious."

"Let them," said Bob; "let them, and then if they send men up here to investigate we will capture them."

"That is a good idea," said Dick; "they will not be likely to send very many men up at a time."

"Not more than two or three, I should think," said Emma.

"That is what I think," said Dick.

So it was decided that a bonfire should be built as soon as it was dark, to serve as a beacon light to show the patriots where the enemy was, and also as a sort of lure to lead redcoats into a trap.

The four went back down and explained the situation to the "Liberty Boys" who were greatly pleased with the plan.

"We'll bag a lot of the redcoats!" said one.

"You are right," from another; "we'll make them wish they had not been so curious-minded."

It grew dark presently, and a dozen of the "Liberty Boys" went to work and made a huge pile of dry wood on the very top of the mountain. The wood consisted of felled boughs and limbs, and would burn splendidly.

"What will we do after the fire is going?" asked Bob; "it will be seen, and we don't want the enemy to see us, or then they might suspect who we are."

"I will keep the fire going," said Emma.

"Oh, that would be too hard work for you," said Dick.

"No, it won't," the girl declared; "I am used to working, and it won't hurt me a bit."

"I'll tell you what we can do, Dick," said Frank Wilson; "some of us fellows can feed the fire from the opposite side from the one the redcoats are on and Emma can feed it from the other side, and the British will be all the more puzzled and curious when they see it is a girl who is tending the fire."

"That isn't a bad idea," Dick acknowledged, "and we will adopt it. Emma won't have to work very hard, then."

When the pile of brush and limbs had assumed goodly proportions the fuel was piled around on the ground in the vicinity, where it would be handy for the youths and the girl, though the most was piled where the girl could get it without having to go far; the youths could bring more from the timber two hundred yards down the mountainside.

It was soon dark enough for the purpose, and then the pile of brush and limbs was set on fire. The dry leaves and twigs blazed up briskly, and the flames seized upon the larger limbs, with the result that soon a big bonfire—a beacon light for sure—was blazing there on the top of Bald Mountain.

Would the combined patriot forces under Shelby and the rest see the signal and understand its meaning?

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEFEAT OF THE REDCOATS.

Of course, Dick and his friends had no way of learning whether or not the signal was seen, but they kept the fire burning, as they had figured on doing, a number of the "Liberty Boys" throwing limbs and sticks of wood on the blaze from the opposite side from the direction in which the redcoats were, and Emma worked on the other side, and was where her form would be outlined against the bright background of the blaze, making it easy for the British to see that she was a woman.

Dick, with a dozen of the "Liberty Boys," was secreted over near the brow of the mountain, where the redcoats would have to pass in coming up, and it was his intention to seize the men and make prisoners of them.

They had been secreted there for two hours before there was the sign of any one to be seen, and then they were not seen, but heard, footsteps being heard near at hand. Dick

listened intently and made up his mind that there were only two persons coming.

"A couple of scouts sent up to learn the meaning of the bonfire," thought Dick; "well, we will give them a surprise."

Closer and closer sounded the footsteps, and presently two shadowy forms could be made out, right in the midst of the party of "Liberty Boys."

Dick gave the signal, which was to be the chirp of a cricket, and the instant the signal sounded the youths leaped upon the two spies from the British encampment, and speedily overpowered them, the youths being very careful to choke the redcoats in such a way as to make it impossible for them to yell.

The youths had provided a number of pieces of rope and very quickly bound and gagged the two redcoats—or rather one redcoat and one Tory, for there was one of each kind.

Then the two were taken to a large tree standing outside the radius of light thrown out by the fire, and were tied there, the "Liberty Boys" hastening back to await the coming of more of their enemies.

They waited perhaps half an hour, and then again footsteps were heard. Dick cautioned the youths to be ready, and when the two—for there were two this time, the same as before—were in the midst of the "Liberty Boys," he gave the signal and the youths leaped upon the spies and speedily downed them.

While this was going on the girl carried sticks and piled them on the fire, which was serving the purpose of a beacon light, luring the redcoats into a trap. Already two were prisoners, and the "Liberty Boys" were overpowering two more. The signal on the mountain was doing double work.

The two were quickly bound and then, figuring that there was plenty of time, Dick told four of the youths to conduct the four prisoners over the brow of the mountain and down to where the youths were encamped.

This was done and fifteen minutes later the four were back with their comrades, having left the four prisoners in the encampment, to be looked after by the "Liberty Boys" there.

An hour passed before any more redcoats came and this time there were four of them. These were made prisoners just as easily as had been the case when there was only two, however, and then the youths returned to their places and waited for more to put in an appearance.

While waiting Dick did considerable thinking, and the result of his thinking was that he decided to have his entire force, with the exception of a couple of youths to look

after the prisoners, and a couple more to help Emma tend the fire, come over and station themselves there with the dozen who had been doing such good work.

"What is your idea for having us come over here, Dick?" asked Sam Sanderson.

"I'll tell you, Sam," was the reply; "it is my opinion that the redcoats are suspicious by this time, eight of the men having come up here and not returned, and I believe that they will send up a force of men to see what is the trouble."

"Ah! then there is a chance that we may have some fighting to do!" exclaimed Sam, in a tone of satisfaction.

"Yes, I think that we will have some fighting to do."

"But won't that be dangerous? The redcoats are more than a thousand in number, while we are only a hundred."

"I know; but the redcoats don't know how many there are of us."

"That is true, of course."

"Yes; and we will put up such a fight, and make so much noise, that they will think there is an army of us."

"We can do that, I think," was the reply.

It turned out that Dick's judgment was excellent, for an hour later a force of at least one hundred men made the attempt to reach the top of the mountain. They suffered for their temerity, however, for the "Liberty Boys" poured such a terrible fire into their ranks that they went down like ten-pins. Of course, the British fired in return, but the "Liberty Boys" were ensconced behind boulders and were not injured, to speak of, although several were wounded.

The redcoats retired and got themselves together again, so to speak, and then made a charge up the side of the mountain. They came on, yelling like demons and firing their muskets and pistols, but they did very little damage; and when the "Liberty Boys" opened fire they created terrible havoc in the ranks of the enemy.

A musket and rifle volley, followed closely by two pistol volleys, was more than the redcoats could stand, and again they turned and fled at the top of their speed leaving many dead and wounded behind them.

An hour passed, and then a redcoat appeared, bearing a flag of truce. Dick went forward to meet him.

"We wish to carry away our dead and wounded," the man said; "may we do so without being fired on?"

"Certainly," replied Dick.

Then the man went back to his comrades with the information, while Dick returned to his friends and told them what the redcoat wanted.

A few minutes later the redcoats appeared in considerable

umbers and carried away the dead and wounded, and when this had been done all was silent and peace seemed to reign where a short time before war had held full sway. Dick was not inclined to trust to appearances, however, and sent out spies to see what the redcoats were about, and stationed a double row of sentinels. Then the rest of the force lay down on their arms and went to sleep.

There was no alarm during the night, and the "Liberty Boys" were up bright and early, for the spies had brought the first word that the British were moving.

"They seem to be afraid that they will be attacked by superior force," said one of the spies.

"They have learned that there are a good many patriot soldiers in this part of the country," said Dick. "I am afraid that they will manage to get out of the mountains and away in safety, before Shelby and the rest can get there."

"Maybe not," said Dick; "if Shelby and the others saw our beacon light last night and hastened to come in this direction, they may be close at hand and we may be able to strike the redcoats before they can get out of the mountains."

"I hope that such will prove to be the case," said Bob. The redcoats broke camp early and started eastward, and as soon as Dick saw what they were going to do he told his "Liberty Boys" to get ready.

"We will keep in front of them and fire upon them and keep them back all we can," he said. "If we can retard their progress sufficiently, perhaps Shelby, Campbell, Williams and the rest will be enabled to overtake them and then we can give them a severe blow—perhaps kill or capture all of them."

"That will be a good plan," said Bob Estabrook. "Then ye won't need me'n Emmy enny longer, Mr. Estabrook?" said Mr. Simmons.

"No, we will be able to get along all right without you, Mr. Simmons," was the reply; "I must thank you, however, for what you have done for us. You have been a great help to us, indeed."

"Waal, I've done whut I could; I guess thet Emmy hez well done more'n whut I hev, fur she had brung ye most the way over the mounting when I met ye."

"That is true, and we most sincerely thank you, Miss Emma."

"Oh, I am glad to have been able to do something for the cause," the girl said, blushing; "no thanks are necessary."

"Nevertheless you have our sincere thanks, and I hope

that we may some time see you and your mother and father again."

"I hope so," was the reply, with a blush, for just then Frank Wilson came up.

"May I speak to you a moment, alone, Emma?" asked the youth.

"Certainly," the girl replied.

Then the two walked off to one side and Dick nodded toward them and said to Mr. Simmons:

"I think you will lose your daughter as soon as the war is over, sir. That young fellow has fallen in love with her."

Mr. Simmons looked slightly troubled, and then sighed and smiled. "I guess et kain't be helped," he said; "jes' so the young feller is er good, true man, thet is all I keer fur. I don't want my girl ter take er noshun ter some good-fur-nothin' chap."

"You can rest easy on that score, sir; Frank is one of the finest fellows in my company, and I would be willing that my own sister should marry him if she cared for him."

"Thet's all right, then."

Frank Wilson was a straightforward sort of a fellow. He had something to tell Emma, and when he was where the other youths would not be able to hear and see him, he paused, and, facing the girl, said:

"Emma, we have known each other a very short time, but in that time I have learned to love you. I have brought you here in order to tell you this and to ask you if you will promise to marry me as soon as the war is ended?"

The girl's eyes were downcast and her face was suffused with blushes, but she said not a word.

The youth stepped forward, quickly, and slipped his arm around the girl's waist. "Look up!" he whispered.

The girl did so, slowly and shyly, and the instant Frank caught sight of the look in the girl's eyes an exclamation of joy escaped him and he caught the girl in both arms and gave her a hug and a dozen or more kisses.

"You will wait for me, Emma?" he whispered.

"I will—Frank!" was the murmured reply, and the youth was happy.

"Good-by, sweetheart, until I come for you!" Frank said. "And I will come just as soon as the war is over, if I am alive!"

"I will wait for you, Frank, and—oh, how I hope you will not be killed before the cruel war is ended!"

One more kiss and then they hastened back, and Frank told Mr. Simmons that he and Emma were engaged.

"All right, my boy," said the girl's father, "I hain't

knowed ye long, but Mr. Slater vouches fur ye, an' I'm willin' ter 'cept ye ez er son-in-law when ther war is over."

Fifteen minutes later the "Liberty Boys" were making their way down the side of the mountain, going in a direction that would enable them to head the redcoats off, and Mr. Simmons and Emma were making their way in the direction leading toward their home.

Emma was as happy as a lark, and sang and laughed and talked at a great rate while they were making their way to their home, and she hastened to tell her mother that she had found a sweetheart among the brave "Liberty Boys."

"Waal, thet suits me a heap sight better'n ef ye hed took er noshun ter wun uv ther Tory boys of the naborhood," said Mrs. Simmons, philosophically. "I'm glad, Emmy, an' I'll warrant ye ther young feller'll make ye er good husban'."

We may as well state before leaving these characters that Frank did go back when the war was ended, and he and Emma were married and were very happy.

The "Liberty Boys" succeeded in getting around in front of the redcoats, and when the enemy came along, fired two volleys into their ranks, and got away so quickly that the British could do nothing in return.

Major Ferguson, the commander of the British force, was wild with rage.

"We must get at those scoundrels and strike them a blow that they won't forget in a hurry!" he cried. "Captain Sharpley, take a hundred men and go in pursuit, and if you catch them give them no chance to escape. Shoot them down as you would so many dogs!"

"All right, major," was the reply, and the captain set out, with a force of one hundred men, in pursuit of Dick and the "Liberty Boys."

Needless to say, Captain Sharpley was unsuccessful. The youths were natural woodsmen, and had no difficulty in throwing the redcoats off the track.

Before Captain Sharpley and his men could rejoin the main force, indeed, Dick and his men had again appeared in front of the redcoats, and had given them two volleys and gotten quickly out of the way as in the first instance.

Major Ferguson raved and swore, but it did no good, and when Captain Sharpley returned and reported that he had been unable to find the rebels, the major was madder than ever.

As may well be supposed, the redcoats were unable to make very great headway, and about the time they would get their dead buried and the wounded into hammock

ambulances the "Liberty Boys" would appear again and give them some more volleys.

Of course, the British fired many volleys, but they did not know in which direction to shoot as they had only the noise made by the firearms to guide them; they never got a sight of the enemy. The result was that they did not do much damage, although they did succeed in wounding a number of the youths. The wounds were, as a rule, trivial, however, for the youths were adepts at protecting themselves behind the trees.

So successful were the "Liberty Boys" in retarding the progress of the British, that Shelby, Campbell, William McDowell and the other partisan leaders, with their thousands and more of allied troops were enabled to catch up with the enemy by nightfall, and Major Ferguson became aware of the fact that now he was in great danger.

He was in a fair way to be surrounded and his little army cut to pieces and captured.

His scouts—he had some very good ones from among the Tories in his force—told him that he was in a fair way to be surrounded, and there was only one way to prevent it, and that was by making a forced march in the darkness of the night. It was decided to do this. A pretence of camping for the night was made, supper was eaten and then as soon as it was dark enough to veil the movements the British set out, marching as rapidly as the circumstances would permit.

But they were dealing with men shrewder than themselves. The forces of the patriots were made up of men who had lived amid the timber and mountains all their lives, and were as much at home there as the squirrels, bears and wild animals of all kinds. They had their scouts out and the movement of the British was quickly made known to the leaders of the allied forces. They set out at once and the "Liberty Boys" and Shelby's force was deputed the task of getting around in front of the enemy, while the others were to enclose the British on the sides and rear, and thus get them surrounded.

This was accomplished successfully, but the redcoats had made very good progress meanwhile and had succeeded in getting close to a mountain which stood almost alone. This was known locally as King's Mountain, and it was chosen by Major Ferguson as being a good position to make a stand.

The allied patriot forces, having "treed their coon," so to speak, went into camp and waited for daylight.

"The redcoats cannot get away from us now," said Shelby; "they are on the mountain-top and we have

mountain surrounded. We will wait till morning and then if they will not surrender we will go for them."

When morning came and Major Ferguson looked around and saw what a natural stronghold he had stumbled upon, he was delighted, and told his men that all the "rebels" in the entire country could not dislodge them, and when Shelby sent up a demand for his surrender, he sent back word that he would fight to the death.

And this is what almost happened, for Ferguson was dealing with mountain men, men used to scaling the rocks, and what seemed to him a place that was impregnable, these sturdy mountaineers speedily proved to be otherwise.

After a stubborn fight the redcoats were forced to surrender, 389 having been killed and 20 being missing. The surrendered numbered 716, and 1,500 stands of arms were captured with the redcoats. The patriots lost only 28 killed and 60 wounded, but one of the killed was James Williams, one of the patriot leaders.

Ferguson was killed on the British side, however, which more than evened things up, as he was the main leader of the British force.

The twelve youths who had joined the "Liberty Boys" for the trip over to Gilbert Town remained with the

youths three or four weeks, and when they went back to their homes and sweethearts they had some wonderful tales to tell of the adventures they had had while with the company of youths known as the "Liberty Boys."

THE END.

The next number (79) of "The Liberty Boys of '76" will contain "THE LIBERTY BOYS' HONOR; OR, THE PROMISE THAT WAS KEPT," by Harry Moore.

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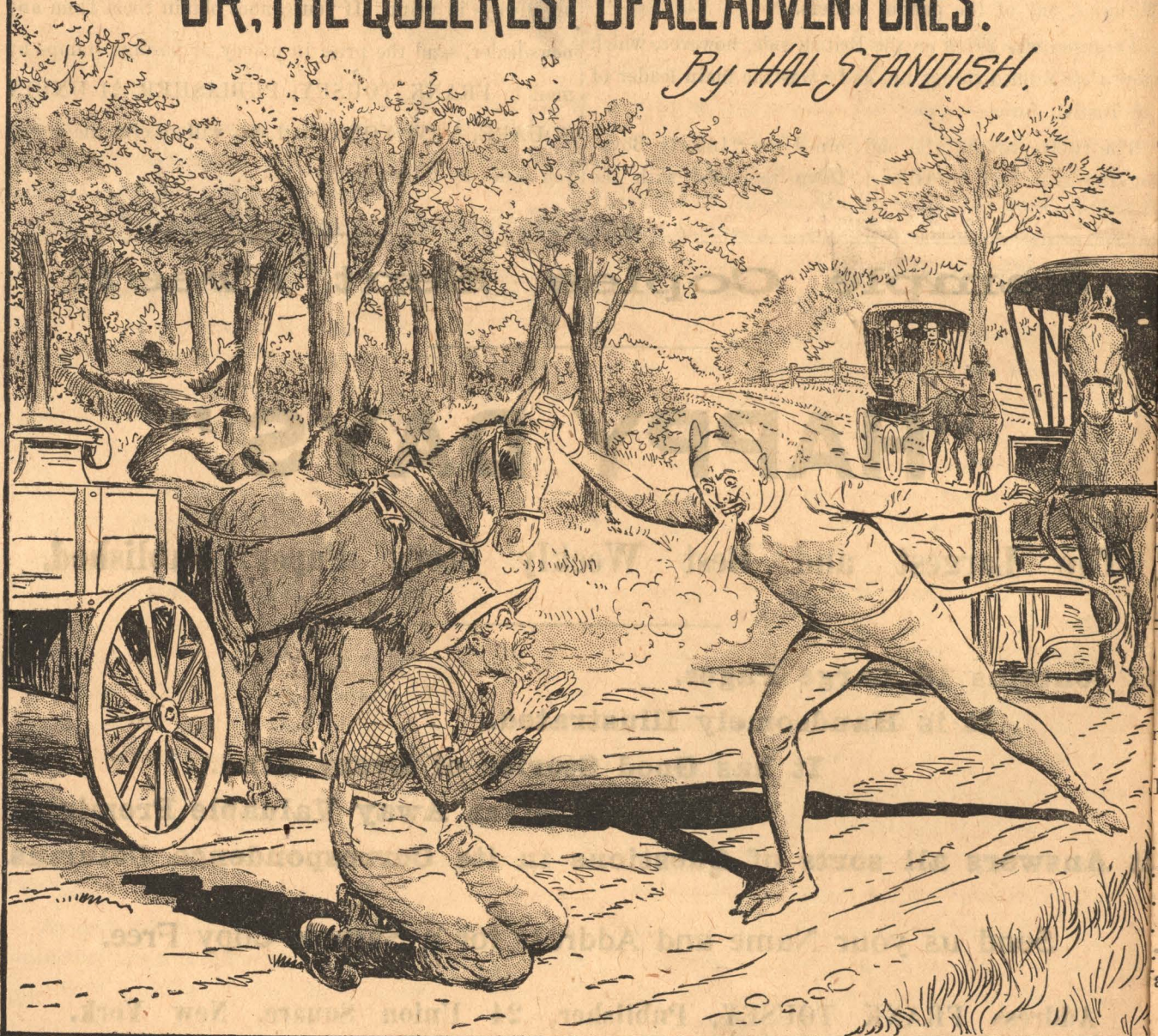
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